



Wisconsin Medical Society

Your Doctor. Your Health.

DATE: June 24, 2002

TO: Governor Scott McCallum

FROM: Catherine Slota-Varma, M.D.
Wisconsin Medical Society
Medical Society of Milwaukee County

RE: Wisconsin "Best Practices": Governor's Listening Session June 24, 2002

On behalf of over 9,000 Wisconsin physicians, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Wisconsin Medical Society and Medical Society of Milwaukee County. In accordance with your request that testimony focus on "best practices," we offer proactive suggestions to address Wisconsin's ever-increasing health care costs. While our list of suggestions could be vast, we have chosen to focus on two examples of large systemic and cultural health policy issues that, if changes, would promote the public health and decrease health care costs: promotion of preventive health care and decreasing the burden of regulatory compliance. Many system changes and collaboration with affected groups will be necessary in the future to ensure that our state's health care costs are decreased, and that the public health is protected. We urge you to recognize that there are no immediate "fixes": large cost savings will be realized only with collaborative policy.

Preventive Health Care

Many chronic health conditions can be prevented. National studies show that preventive health care improves patient health, prevents future disease and co-morbidities, and saves government money. Chronic condition incidence and prevalence have skyrocketed in recent years due to an increasingly unhealthy and aging population. At the same time, we live in a climate of cutting edge research and technology, which enables physicians to better diagnose and treat chronic conditions at higher rates than ever. Preventive medicine also saves money for everyone by eliminating later treatment of co-morbidities often related with chronic diseases.

Examples of preventive medicine that promote public health while saving money include:

- Mental health parity. If mental health conditions received equal health insurance coverage as other medical conditions, many of these conditions could be treated much more effectively.
- Flu and pneumonia immunization
- Breast Cancer and Colon Cancer Screening
- Tobacco Prevention

- Monitoring of heart and diabetes patients. Both of these populations are at high risk for later acute, and expensive, health problems.

We urge you to support preventive health care policy in Wisconsin to promote the public health and save government dollars.

Regulatory Compliance

As today's health care environment changes, state and federal regulations to monitor these changes increase. While some compliance requirements protect and improve patient health and safety, others conflict, decrease efficiency, cause unnecessary cost inflation and most importantly, do not promote the best interest of the patient. Physicians spend a significant portion of each day maintaining compliance with regulations, rather than providing direct patient care. The cost of compliance continues to increase, yet these costs do not yield across-the-board improvement.

Examples of current compliance requirements that physicians must follow include:

- Medicare (health care reimbursement)
- Medicaid (health care reimbursement)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (privacy)
- Physician Office Visit Data Collection (POVD) (DHFS data collection)
- Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) (hospital and provider accreditation)
- Updated Information Systems (New technology, computer system)

We urge you to carefully consider the effects of compliance on physicians and patients, and what types of regulation are necessary to truly promote the public health, and eliminate those that are inefficient. It has been estimated that the cost alone for HIPAA compliance for physicians will cost millions of dollars.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with our recommendations. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that the health of Wisconsin is protected while containing health care costs for everyone.

Please contact Alice O'Connor (aliceo@wismed.org), R.J. Pirlot (rjp@wismed.org) or Liz Schumacher (lizs@wismed.org) if you would like further information or if you have any questions.